

## **SUMMER GATHERING 4: DeRouchie Message on Phil 1:18b–21 Sovereign Joy Baptist Church**

### REJOICING IN RESCUE WHEN DEATH IS GAIN (PHILIPPIANS 1:18b–21)

Sovereign Joy Baptist Church exists to glorify God through the Word and Spirit by making mature disciples for the joy of all peoples in Jesus. Paul was a mature disciple filled with joy in all circumstances, and he wanted to see others “rejoice in the Lord always” (Phil 4:4). I want us to consider the nature of this joy as we look at Philippians 1:18b–21. Turn with me to Philippians 1 as I pray....

Acts 16 tells us how God birthed the church in Philippi. In a night vision, Paul saw a man of Macedonia urging him to come and help, and Paul concluded that God was calling him to preach the gospel to the Macedonians (Acts 16:9–10). Philippi was his first stop in this new district, and whereas he had seen a man calling in the vision, the initial convert was a wealthy and influential woman named Lydia (16:14–15). Next, was a former fortune-teller / slave girl, whom Paul, with the power of Christ, freed from her spirit of divination (16:16–18). This led to Paul and Silas being beaten with rods and imprisoned (16:23–24). Yet it was in that context—after some extended prayer, singing of hymns, an earthquake, and the prisoners not fleeing—that God saved Paul’s jailer and his whole family (16:25–33). Not only this, the magistrates had unjustly punished Paul as a Roman citizen without a trial, and this led to their public apology that drew attention to Paul’s gospel testimony and helped birth the church in Philippi.

A rich woman, a slave girl, and a jailer and his family were the founding members of the Philippian church, and they likely are among the recipients of this letter that Paul affirms for their “partnership in the gospel from the first day until now” (Phil 1:5). He also lets them know that the very power that once saved the jailer and his family is at work again: “I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel, so that it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard and to all the rest that my imprisonment is for Christ” (1:12–13). Not only this, Paul recognized that the very suffering he was enduring as a goer could also be endured by the Philippians as one of his sending partners. So he says in 1:29–30, “It has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake, engaged in the same conflict that you saw I had and now hear that I still have.” Paul is convinced that God is sovereign; he’s the one who awakens saving faith *and* leads believers into suffering (cf. 2:12–13). And Paul writes to share with the Philippian church how to endure with joy.

Follow along as I read, beginning at the end of verse 18.

Yes, and I will rejoice,<sup>19</sup> for I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ this [imprisonment] will turn out for my deliverance,<sup>20</sup> as it is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be at all ashamed, but that with full courage now as always Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death.<sup>21</sup> For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. (Phil 1:18b–21)

I want to consider three elements in this text: Paul’s Joy, Paul’s Knowledge, and Paul’s Hope.

### **Paul’s Joy and Knowledge**

The main idea of these verses is captured in the apostle’s promise and rationale: “I will rejoice. For I know that ... this will turn out for my deliverance” (1:18–19). Paul’s declaration of joy is grounded in a certain knowledge; he would remain satisfied in Jesus through pain because his coming freedom is certain. But is Paul convinced simply that he would be physically released from prison?

We know that he expected this for he says in 1:25, “I know that I will remain and continue with you all, for your progress and joy in the faith” (cf. 2:23–24). Yet Paul is not presuming on his release, for his certainty of deliverance is in accordance with “my eager expectation and hope that ... Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life *or by death*” (1:20). The apostle believes his salvation may come *even by death*.

While my ESV does not cross reference the book of Job (see the CSB note), the Greek clause rendered *this will turn out for my deliverance* repeats exactly the patriarch’s words from Job 13:16. These are the only two places this clause occurs in Scripture, so I think Paul is likely drawing on Job’s declaration of hope out of his suffering. Having endured deep loss and having unceasing pain with boils covering his body, Job declares of God:

Though he slay me, yet I will hope in him;  
I will surely defend my ways to his face.  
Indeed, *this will turn out for my deliverance*,  
for no godless person would dare come before him. (Job 13:15–16, NIV)

Job is certain of his future “deliverance” even if his sickness results in death with God slaying his body. This “deliverance” is, therefore, his eternal life and vindication in God’s presence in which is “fulness of joy” (Ps 16:11), and I propose this is what Paul has in mind in Philippians 1. May Sovereign Joy Baptist Church be a community that is filled with goers and senders who have this deep seated assurance—that because our citizenship is in heaven (Phil 3:20) and because Jesus’s faithfulness is certain (1:6) and because our future is, therefore, absolutely

secure (1:19), we can seek to spread and live out the gospel in the hardest places and at the hardest times with joy.

As a Christian, Paul has repeatedly been willing to suffer for Christ's sake and for the ultimate joy of all peoples in Jesus Christ. Because, in Christ, he no longer fears death, he is passionately able to proclaim Jesus without reserve (cf. Heb. 2:14–15). Jesus told his disciples, “You will be delivered up even by parents and brothers and relatives and friends, and some of you they will put to death. You will be hated by all for my name's sake. But not a hair of your head will perish. By your endurance you will gain your lives” (Luke 21:16–19). “Some of you they will put to death.... But not a hair of your head will perish.” Christians rest assured of future salvation as we are carried in the hands of our sovereign God.

### **Paul's Hope**

Paul had joy; Paul had knowledge; and Paul also had hope. Our sovereign God uses means to accomplish his ends, and he will only bring Paul's deliverance through the saints' intercession and the Spirit of Jesus's presence. He will also only eternally save those whose lives are in accord with a certain pattern of life.

Paul says, “It is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be at all ashamed, but that with full courage now as always Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death. For to me to live is Christ and to die is gain” (1:20–21). Paul's passion is that Christ be honored. That is, the apostle hopes that what takes place in his body would display Jesus's unmatched supremacy and magnify his unparalleled worth. Paul wants this to happen *in his body*—not in some other-worldly or spiritual way but in his words, his gestures, his reactions, his thoughts. As he faces the Roman tribunal, “whether by life or by death” may he courageously make much of Jesus. This is his eager expectation and hope.

The word “For” at the head of verse 21 is significant for it signals that what follows clarifies why Paul believes Christ will be honored in these spheres. Let us briefly look at each, and as I do consider your own pattern.

Paul will magnify Christ in his life *because* to him “to live is Christ.” This seems to mean that we honor Jesus when he is at the center of your life's solar system—when every thought and value, decision and deed is informed by who he is and what he wants. Jesus is the one who Paul says in Philippians 2 “made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant” and became “obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore, God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name” (2:7–9). You must, in turn, “Let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ” (1:27). Giving definition to this in chapter 3, Paul says, “Whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of

knowing Christ Jesus my Lord” (3:7–8). Paul’s logic is this: By magnifying Christ we display his worth, and honoring him in this way gives us confidence that our future is secure. And when our future salvation is certain, we can commit to rejoice every day come what may. I will rejoice, Paul says, because I know that I will be delivered in accordance with my hope of honoring Christ in by body by living as if he is my all-consuming passion.

But not only this, Paul seeks that “now as always Christ will be honored in my body ... by death, for to me ... to die is gain.” When we truly believe that death is gain, Christ is magnified. Facing a sentence that could result in life or death, Paul says in 1:23: “I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better.” To be with Jesus is far better than anything this world has to offer.

As I age and mature, I increasingly sense this truth, because the world is broken and hard. Yet most people in this world operate as if death is loss, not gain. In his parable of the soils, Jesus notes how easily “the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches and the desires for other things enter in and choke the word, and it proves unfruitful” (Mark 4:19). Yet Jesus called us not to “lay up ... treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy” but to “lay up ... treasures in heaven” (Matt 6:19–20). Thus, Paul says at the end of this book, “I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. I can do all things through him who strengthens me” (Phil 4:12–13). In valuing Christ above all else, Paul declares, “For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ” (3:8). Every tent Paul made, every conversation he had, every journey he took he wanted to be related to his quest for gain—his quest for Christ. We often know what we value most when things of earth are taken away. Do your vehicles, your home, your wardrobe, your hobbies, your children testify that you have something more to live for than this life? Do you believe that “to die is gain” (1:21)?

You and I can rejoice today in a secure future if we are among those who believe “to live is Christ and to die is gain” and by this to honor Christ. “Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own” (3:12). Suffering is hard, but there is strength within the sorrow and beauty in the tears. You and I can rejoice because we know that our future is secure even as we hope to honor Christ in our bodies. May God use Sovereign Joy to raise up goers and senders who retain such joy, such knowledge, and such hope.